My 20th Century:
Facts meet Fiction

in an Autobiographical Narrative
in
Free Verse, Rhyme and Reason

by

Paul Garrison

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Santa Fe, NM

This work is dedicated to Frank Moore.

Until I heard him read his poetry, I had never written a line of poetry in my life (not counting some limericks).

So, it's all his fault; and to my wife Marianne who one day said, why not tell the story of your life in narrative poem form?

So, it's her fault too; and, of course to that three quarters of a century (plus a little extra) that has been my life.

When I was born it was still in its 'teens,
its late 'teens,
this century that changed the world like no other.

The telephone had already been invented
(the phone number at our house was 6),
a few people actually drove automobiles,
but radio and its inevitable noise pollution
were still a thing of the future.

When I was born
the misguided Germans
(my countrymen then, I guess)
were still fighting the rest of the world,
though anyone with any brains
(that left out the Kaiser)
knew the war was lost.

While present for the occasion
of my birth
I have no first-hand knowledge of that day.

I do know that my parent's bedroom,
the one in which,
without having had any input in the selection of the location,
I was born,
had its walls covered with an endless repetition of pink roses,
pure *kitsch*.

When I was born
the doctor,
the one to help me become a *Mensch*
arrived on his bicycle in the rain,
late
because taxis,
they hadn't been invented yet.

Being the last of a number of siblings,
my father is said the have managed the feat,
the doctor's only remaining job
involving, cutting the umbilical cord,
which he did expertly.

When I was quite little, Lisabeth
(one of my sisters,
twenty years my senior and married)
brought her then one-year-old daughter Sottl for a visit to Hamm
(Hamm being the town where all this took place).

Sottl was a bundle of youthful energy
attacking me in a state of complete nakedness
in the hall at the foot of the stairs,
scaring me
(I was only three)
half to death,
because naked bodies
of any age or sex
didn't normally run around at *Ostenallee* 86.

When I grew up
some more people had automobiles,
the rich ones.
The rest of us walked
or rode our bicycles (without helmets),
and there were always the trolley cars
with their rails down the middle
of the *Ostenallee*
ringing bells,
wheels clanking
but always on time
(this was Germany, after all).

When I was still only three
(I think)
there was a girl my age living next door.
With both houses having large gardens in back
we used to play hide-and-seek
and other games.

I couldn't have been more than three
when Annie took me by the hand into the bushes
in the back of the garden
and said
"Let's play doctor."

She'd heard that boys are built different
from girls
and she was curious.
"I want to see,
here, I show you mine,"
and she lifted her skirt
and pulled down her panties
to show me.

"Now you."
She did look different down there
so I unzipped
but she was impatient,
pulled down my pants
and underpants
and then just stood there
looking.

"Can I touch?"
She did.
It grew
and she said "oh..." in wonderment
and used both hands
to touch everything
and hold it
until it was too late
and I got her wet.

"Smells funny,"
she wiped herself with a handkerchief
but still wouldn't let go.
"Nice," she said.
"Why don't girls?"
I didn't know
but there was the sound of a door
from the house
and we hurried up to get back
into our clothes.

"Different," she mumbled
as she walked off
triumphantly.

Eventually and inevitably there it was,
the box that talked:
Achtung, Achtung, Westdeutscher Rundfunk
followed by I know not what.
It mattered little, what mattered was, it talked.

When I was five
my father's mother had moved in with us
(maybe looking for an comfortable place
in which
to die).
I, taken to her room,
am said to have said,
"Grandmother, I understand
you are about to die,"
to which she is said
to have answered,
"Yes, Paul, I know that already."

At the funeral I was disturbed
when the persons carrying the coffin
put it down several times before reaching the actual grave.
I do remember thinking
grandmother must have been very heavy for them to do this,
but it was explained to me
later, when I asked
that putting the coffin down three times
had religious significance,
and nothing to do with the weight of the old lady.

What kind of religious significance
I had no idea,
and didn't ask.

During the first years of my life,
(without my knowledge)
there was what amounted to civil war
in Berlin and a few other cities,
with the *Spartakusbund* (left wing)
fighting the *Freikorps* (right wing}
by shooting one another all over the place,
and conducting some fairly despicable murders
such as the ones of Karl Liebknecht
and Rosa Luxenburg,
with the body of the latter
found days later floating in some canal.

With today's instant communication via radio and TV
it is difficult to understand
how well meaning but incompetent people
like Friedrich Ebert
were able somehow to form a Republic
with something resembling a government
with Ebert as president.

When I was five
my father one day marched into the kitchen
triumphantly
waving a 5-Renten Mark bill
representing the first real money
after years of run-away inflation
that had seen the price of a simple postage stamp
go from
ten *Pfennig*
to 100 *Milliarden* (billions)
causing all savings and investments
to become worthless.

I may, of course, be wrong
but the inflation was the only solution
left to the people running Germany at the time,
to deal with the unmanageable cost of the war reparations
with which the Allies

goaded by France's Clemenceau,
had tried to subdue Germany in perpetuity

through the Versailles Treaty.

At the time I did not understand
the real meaning
and importance
of that new money and of
the stability that was to be its result.

Late in 1932 and early 1933 Germany
was a mess;
all those uniformed Nazis were running around with guns,
as did a lot of others.
People were being shot right and left
in Berlin and other cities
for no reason other than giving the communist
--raised fist--
or the Nazi
--raised open hand--
salute.
Granted. some were calculated political murders
of important left- or right-wing types
but there were many others
with no particular political ax to grind
who just got in the way.

And all this time the government
was split between thirty-plus parties
unable or unwilling to effectively govern,
its popular reputation somewhere below the floor boards.

Along came this strange little man,
not even a German but an Austrian,
with that funny mustache,
who made speech after speech,
offering all manner of wild promises
idiotic solutions to perceived problems,
the first politician in history
to use radio
as an enormously effective political tool.

I listened to many of those endless speeches

understanding little of what was being said
and remembering none of it.

It wasn't what he said;
it was that voice
that transfixed his audience,
made it believe in him
as the savior of the country.

From the time I was able to read,
I had devoured the books by Karl May,
who wrote about the American West
and about the Middle East,
indelibly impressing on my memory
the Apache hero *Winnetou* and his cowboy friend *Old Shatterhand*
and the Arabian hero
Hadji Alef Omar Ben Hadji Abul Abbas Ibn Hadji Davud al Gossarah,
(which taught me that the word Hadji
means a person has conducted a Hadj
or the journey to the holy city of Mecca.)

When I was nine
a skinny American
with guts and some luck
flew west-east across the Atlantic and proved
that it could be done,
making the world a bit smaller in the
bargain.

When I was ten
in my first year as a student
in the *Humanistische Gymnasium*
(the German version of high school
with a bit of junior college thrown in)
we spent the summer vacation
visiting famous Gothic churches
in Cologne, Bonn and other cities along the Rhine;
then taking a boat trip up-river
from Koblenz to Mainz
past famous castles and the Lorelei
(of mythology fame).

We spent time in Switzerland
at the Sea of Lucerne
(where William Tell with bow and arrow

shot an apple off the head of his son,
to win a bet for his people).

Then two weeks at the *Hotel Edelweiss*
in Adelboden
with a view of three famous mountains
(the *Jungfrau, Mönch* and *Eiger*);
the first time
I was out of the country
of my birth.

When I was fourteen and fifteen
there was nothing unusual about my gathering a few school buddies
and traipsing all over the country
wandering on foot
or hitching rides.

At one time we found ourselves on a freight barge
floating down the Elbe.
It taught me an interesting physical phenomenon.
Since the barge had no engine,
it simply floated down-river with the current,
tying up at night and resuming its journey each morning.

I figured that logically,
since it was the current that drove the vessel,
it would be safe and easy to jump into the water and swim along.
Wrong.
It turned out that it took all my ability to swim as fast as possible
barely to keep up with it.

I discussed this puzzle with the captain,
he explained that the mouth of the river
is many hundred feet lower
and that the speed of the barge is caused not only by the current,
but also by gravity,
making it move faster than the surrounding water.
(Whether this is scientifically correct
I don't know,
but I do know that the barge
moved much faster than the water of the river).

Another incident
one with tragic consequences,
was a simple one-day trip into the woods
during which one of my class mates decided that a particular tree

simply needed to be climbed.

We all loved to climb trees,
but this one appeared to be particularly difficult,
but he refused to be deterred.
He made it three quarters of the way to the top
when a twig broke and he fell.

He broke his neck in the fall and by the time help arrived
he had died.
Even though I was assumed to be the leader of the group,
no one ever blamed me,
but it did take me a while to get over
this first encounter
with death.

It was either 1928 or 1929
when the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*
(today simply referred to as the *Nazis*)
gained strength at the polls

What did strike me
was the sudden repeated references
in newspapers, magazines
and on the radio
to *Juden.*

I had no idea what a *Jude* was, so one day I cornered my father.
"*Vater, sag mal, was ist ein Jude?"*
(Father, tell me, what is a Jew?)

This brought about a long dissertation,
of Judaism as both, a religion and a race,
and of the fact
that my father and his family, where Jewish
even though he had been christened a Protestant
when marrying my mother
to avoid having his children grow up in a family with divided religious beliefs.

Since I don't recall anyone in my family ever going to church,
I never thought much about religious beliefs
but I did sense that my father was somehow uncomfortable
with this whole business,
and decided to drop the subject.

Hitler was the savior of the country,
the one to cut through the shackles of the Versailles Treaty,
the one whose pathetic hatred of Jews
bellowed over the now ever-present radio
would certainly vanish with time and success
(or so everyone thought).

As I wandered and hitched rides
all over the country
I made a friend called Erich along the way:

When I write, as oft I do
the tales I tell are rarely true;
not this, this is a diff'rent case
about a boy of my own race.

Think long ago and far away
when Hitler held Europe in sway
there was this boy called Erich something
who thought the *Führer* was the one thing,

the one to save the fatherland
from villains far and close at hand
and quite especially from Jews
which made him join the Hitler Youth.

Thus, all decked out in belt and boots,
brown shirt and swastika, he roots
for super men of Aryan race,
excitement shining in his face.

But then there came that fateful day
when father, mother had their say.
They knew the secret must be revealed
despite knowing the shock it dealed.

"Erich," the father's voice was shaking
"I'm not the man you have been taking
me for. No son, I'm sorry, but it's true
I am, have always been a Jew."

No further words, that day, were spoken

the boy, whose faith had thus been broken
went to his room and made a noose
because he had nothing to lose

except his life. What life was that?
To hide the truth? Might's well be dead.
A half a Jew, he could not bear
to live a lie, pretend that there

was still a future. It had vanished;
for ever on he would be banished
from taking part in things to come,
the glory, victories, the sum

of all the *Führer* would achieve
for Germany. He did believe
it would be best for all concerned
if he were dead, cremated, burned;

and thus he kicked the chair away
and broke his neck in fall and sway.
His parents, tears in horror shed
when in his room they found him, dead.

When I was sixteen
I learned about girls;
the first one saying
when it was all over, "you have talent,"
which I never forgot.

I had left school
gone to Berlin which even then
was exciting, depraved, a center of
what was left of free thought and original talent
in this country
that Hitler called his Third Reich.

I took a job
to learn photography as a profession
with a famous photographer,
a Jew,
who one day, a year later,
disappeared without a trace.

There were more girls, of course
with names like Helga, Ursula, Ruth or Brigitte

but I no longer remember
their faces (or bodies).

I made a friend who might best be described
as the Aryan ideal,
very tall,
very blonde,
a truly beautiful young man.

He was a year or two older than I,
had just enrolled in the *Luftwehr*,
saying,
if Hitler was good for anything at all,
it might as well be for teaching him how to fly airplanes.

I told him about my being half Jewish
and he couldn't have cared less,
saying that
the Nazis were certain to get us into a war that,
eventually we were sure to lose.

"When that happens, I'm going to fly my airplane west
as far as the fuel will take me and then
I hope
that some American ship will pick me up.
I'm sure not going to get my fool-head blown off
for any of those idiots."

We made a pact:
should both of us survive that long,
we would meet at the entrance to the *Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche*
(Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church)
in Berlin on New Year's Eve 1999.

When I was nineteen
there were rumors
whispered
of concentration camps
and Jews,
homosexuals
and others who had talked too much
(probably saying the wrong things
to the wrong people)
unaccountably disappearing
(including my photographer)

while I
one half of me a Jew
made all the necessary preparations
to leave the country:

1937

It only happened once
but once was enough.

I was 19 then
in that June of 1937 and
after four years of Hitler
I was ready to leave
for America and freedom.

The scene:
a compartment in a railroad car
moving west
toward the border with Holland.

Would I make it?
Would I be permitted?
Would they let me?
They
with their brown shirts
and black, white and red swastika armbands.

I had told the authorities
that I was leaving to study abroad,
that I would be back.
I had lied.

Did they know that?
Did they suspect?

The door to the compartment opens;
a brown shirt,
a black/white/red swastika armband,
blond hair,
blue eyes,
young,
not much older than I.

The Aryan ideal,
heels clicking,

"*Papiere bitte!*"

I tried not to shake,
not to look the way I felt
afraid.

He studied the papers
seconds
minutes
hours
it seemed like
"*Alles in Ordnung!*"

He handed me my papers
Clicked his heels
"*Heil Hitler"*
and turned away,
not waiting for the greeting
I could not give.

The train moved on
west
across the border into Holland.

Free at last!

And so
I went off to America with
two dollars fifty in my pocket
to seek the fortune
I knew I was destined for.

The crossing
a long one,
was most enjoyable,
largely because of a young German woman,
girl actually,
called Helga
who, quite sensibly, decided
that a week-long Atlantic affair
would be just the thing
to liven things up.

It was late,

the first night of the crossing
walking around the deck,
standing at the railing at the bow in the moonlight,
watching the white caps.

"Come,"
taking my hand, leading the way
to Cabin 13, a closet-size single-occupancy space that
was to be my home away from home
(what home?)
for this and the ensuing nights.

Once inside
she began to unbutton
the top button of her blouse,
smiled, "You do it"
as she turned off the light.

The light from the moon
squeezed in through the porthole,
giving her skin a bluish glow.

She turned,
her light pink firmly erect nipples pointed straight at me.
She took one of my hands
placed it on her right breast
then,
taking my head into both her hands,
she put her lips to mine,
used her tongue to open my mouth wider,
played her tongue inside
pressing her lower body against me.

Retrieving her tongue
she sucked at mine until
for a moment
I was tasting blood.

She pulled down her panties,
now undoing unzipping

"Lie down"
kneeling by the bed
studying
from top to bottom with special emphasis

on what was standing proudly erect.

She climbed on the bed,
took me into her hand
straddling
fed me into her.

"Don't move."
Starting to push, she held back.
"Lie still. I'll do the moving when the time comes."

With a slow circular movement
until I thought I'd explode,
and then I did.

It took maybe a half an hour
with the two of us lying side by side,
her hand lazily manipulating,
until she expertly maneuvered me on top of her,
guiding
"Slow, take it easy."

Eventually
fitted to one another like two spoons
totally drained,
we slept.

Dreaming that something was being done
I awoke;
that incredible feeling caused by her mouth
her lips,
her tongue playing,
her fingers kneading,
finally climaxing into her mouth.

On the ninth day
the ship was being maneuvered into the pier;
she stood behind me
slowly massaging my back.
"I'm going to miss you,"

My brother was waiting for me,

I saw,
at the pier.
I turned,
gave her a quick peck on the cheek
as the gangplanks were put into place.

"See you."
Swinging my duffel bag onto my shoulder
I was among the first to debark.

The first week in New York
I met a young German, some five years older than I,
by the name of Hans Schülein,
who became my best friend until the day he died.
(Remember the name,
there's more about him later.)

I learned to speak the language of America
and the meaning of those expletives
used by so many
so often.

(I asked a young woman what does it mean
"Fucking?"
and she laughed, saying,
"What do you think we've been doing?")

To my surprise,
expletives, expressions of anger
and derision
in my new language
(unlike in German)
referred to
to what I considered beautiful -
sex.

And then I met her,
the woman to share the rest of my life,
Maruianne

When first I saw you, it was lust.
Your body! I felt that I must
experience that ecstatic feeling
something I knew would send me reeling;
to touch the curves, flat plains, touch all

of you, that body, tall
the breasts, the buttocks and those legs,
that dancer's muscles move and flex,
but feminine and smooth and warm,
to my eyes, the most perfect form.

With lust fulfilled I wanted more
only to find that at the core
you where a feeling, loving one,
both smart and funny, lacking none
of what I'd looked for in a mate,
a woman sharing all my fate,
my life, my days, my nights, my bed,
my thoughts, my secrets, all I had
been planning for the balance of
my life, a life fulfilled with love.

We shared that life with joys and sorrows
years of yesterdays and more tomorrows
slowly growing all the way
from lust to love and come what may
a life of taking and of giving
of savoring the art of living
(of never ever lacking
of what a cruder one calls fucking)
where each shares all of the others'
hopes and forgives the many bothers
that for lesser couples meant
friction, divorce and argument.

Thus lust through love to friendship turned
(the ecstasy that once had burned
in both of us, smolders no more
with sex not now the erstwhile lore)
we jointly savor what we hope
will be a future wide in scope,
a future of continued learning
(we are obliged to keep on earning
the right to live another day
by learning something new to say)
a future, brief or long--who knows?
but just as long as each day shows
that our lives have not been squandered
while yon and hither we have wandered
then if the end comes, soon or late

(it matters not to know the date)
we can appreciate the gift
that was the life that we have lived.

When I was twenty
I bought my first car
an unwieldy four-door Packard sedan
called Leviathan
that had great difficulty exceeding the statewide speed limit
of 40 mph.

When I complained to the dealer
I was told
"It's the speed limit.
We're not responsible for anything above that."

Those were those good old days:

New York, the late thirties when for three cents a day
the *Examiner, Herald* and *Times* had their say
while the *Daily News* and the *Mirror* could be
had for two cents if you could not afford three.

It was then that my job paid fifteen a week
and I lived on it, neither fancy nor bleak;
Chock Full o' Nuts hot dogs cost only a dime
coffee a nickel, all you could drink at a time.

Five cents bought a ride to anywhere at that time
while the double-decker Fifth Avenue bus charged a dime
and Park Avenue, deciding then (as it still does)
that public transport is not for its upscale class.

When skirts were worn below the knee
and women wore hats, gloves and, yes siree,
young men wore jackets and ties in summer
if they had arrived or were still a comer.

When the buttons on the shirt, jacket or vest
you bought a year back or more, you guessed
were still in place and holding fast
with the seams well sewn so they would last.

When *African American* was a shipping line,
and *gay* meant happy, carefree and fine

while girls, not all, thank God, but most
kept their virginity, then lost
it, part of an established rite
known as their cherished wedding night.

When new arrivals took great pride
in learning the language and speaking it right;
in taking out papers they knew they would need
to become part of the American creed.

But then also *restricted* was meant to say
Jews, not invited, please stay away,
and when black entertainers, playing fancy spas,
had to sleep in flop houses uptown, or in cars.

When women on Broadway charged two bucks a night,
and cross-town taxis a quarter a ride.

And if for'n abortion you needed to pay
you traveled by car to Pottstown P.A.
where a doctor who believed even then in your right
did it, but asked that you stay the night
because, no butcher, he needed assured
you were healthy and safe and above all cured.

When best of all, there was no TV yet
to fill your room from dawn to bed
with democrats who love to bicker,
republicans obstruct and snigger;
and the crime of the day in all its glory
with pictures preferably much too gory
or needles stuck in someone's arm
in too extreme close-up, lacking charm.

Those were the days when you stayed married
no matter if it turned out harried;
but if you were serious about a divorce
you went to Reno and stayed the course,
which gave you the right to shed your spouse,
a cheat, a nice guy or even a louse.

And when you traveled to exotic locations
like sinful Los Angeles, or visit relations,
you rode New York Central, the railroad train,
had to change in Chicago, a real pain,

a ride that took several days and nights
with great plains and rockies providing the sights.

In those days movies, already with sound
in black and white, double features abound
where married couples used twin beds to sleep,
at least two feet apart; Will Hays, that creep
dictated the rules, no cleavage, no breast,
and kisses to last only seconds at best.

When anyone who was anyone or considered so
met at the Stork Club or El Morocco
whose head waiters, keepers of velvet ropes,
looked you up and down, made you feel like dopes
before permitting or refusing admission
to join the elite on its way to perdition.

When Hitler an ogre in far away lands.
This country at peace, safe in Roosevelt's hands.

When the *New Yorker* would not have hinted
at four-letter words in the stories it printed;
and pictures of naked ladies were found
in art galleries, never on news stands around.

When I was still not yet twenty-one
in business for myself
my photographs of women
of fashion, of glamour appeared
in *Harper's* and *Vogue,*
Lisa (the only model ever to get on the cover of *Time*)
Helen Bennett, Muriel Maxwell
you name them,
all the top models of the day
then getting all of $10 an hour,
(today they'd get $10,000 a day)
in expensive clothes,
or nude (often the same models,
having been talked out of their clothes--
show me the well built young woman
who doesn't simply love a legitimate opportunity
to take her clothes off--)
in *Esquire* and *Coronet*.

Greta Keller
a singer of somewhat advanced age
(she claimed to be a contemporary of Marlene Dietrich)
who had been famous
in Germany before the war
had wangled an engagement at the *Queen Mary,*
a night club on Manhattan's East Side,
and I helped with the preparations,
making sure that the lights
and the sound system
were set to do her justice.

Her engagement was less than a triumph,
largely,
I thought,
because she insisted on singing
those Austrian *Lieder*

which went over
rather like a lead balloon
with the quite sophisticated audience
frequenting that place.

A magazine sent me west,
to Hollywood
to photograph Jane Russell
for its cover.

She was discovered by Howard Hughes
who, everyone knew, expected to use
her impressive dimensions, 'spec'ly her bust
in a movie full of desire and lust.

The one he hired, to do the job,
to tell the world of his new find
Russ Birdwell, then P.R. man on top,
money, no object for men of his kind.

Hollywood, a place of fable
of movie stars, like one Clark Gable;
where life was mostly just pretense
in past, present and future sense.

Booked into the Beverly Wilshire Hotel
in Beverly Hills,

one of Russell Birdwell's men,
Jack Armstrong by name,
took me to lunch and the famous Brown Derby
and on the way
dropped a bundle of to-be-mailed letters
casually on the sidewalk.

Perplexed, I asked why
and was told
"Don't worry. There's always someone
who'll pick them up and mail them."
Hollywood!

Staying at the Beverly Wilshire were
Erich Maria Remarque, the author
(*All Quiet on the Western Front)*
(Im Westen Nichts Neues),
a fairly sour individual,
who never talked much.

There also was his then girl friend,
actress and dancer called Vera Zorina
who was getting over the disappointment of having lost the part
of the female lead in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
to Ingrid Bergman
after she had cut off all her hair to look the part for her screen test.

Since Remarque was still a German citizen
(as technically was I)
and reasonably well known,
he could never leave the hotel in the evening.
(California had an 8 P M. curfew
for non-citizens)

I, on the other hand,
being by now fairly fluent in English
was able to move about freely
with no one ever questioning my activities.

During that stay at the Beverly Wilshire
I also met Esther Williams
who regularly came to use the pool.

One time she said, "race you to the other end,"
I had no choice but

of course she won.
After all, she wasn't an Olympic gold-medal swimmer for nothing.

During that time I met Martha Scott
(winner of an Academy Award for her part in *Our Town)*
who invited me to her house in the San Fernando Valley.

She drove me there across Benedict Canyon,
and it was during this drive
that I decided that if we ever did move West,
this was the place I wanted to live.

I also was invited
by several studios to visit the sets
of motion pictures in production
(one on the occasion
of the shooting
of the classic last scene of *Casablanca*
on a sound stage
filled with artificial fog,

Humphrey Bogart
Conrad Veidt
Ingrid Bergman
Claude Rains
and Paul Henreid
(who long ago had decided that his real name
Paul von Hernreid
was a bit much
for Hollywood)
and the classic exit line:
"This may be the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

I soon learned that
waiting
and waiting
is a major part of motion picture making:

Six-fifteen P.M.
"Cut, Print.
It's a wrap."

The words
five single syllables

they've been waiting
and waiting
and waiting to hear ever since

Five-thirty A.M.
makeup
then hair
and wardrobe
standing still while they pin, sew, pleat.

Eight A.M.
the sound stage
camera crew
gaffer
grips, best boys, electricians, assistants
and assistants to assistants
all busy
getting things ready for
SCENE 342 TAKE 1

Eight-forty-five A.M.
the director is arguing with the script girl
the producer is talking to some newspaper types
the executive producer doesn't bother to come to the set
the camera man motions to the gaffer
the gaffer shouts something to the electrician
up high
a stand-in stands in
the sound man tells her
"Say something for level"
"One two three four five testing"
"Fine"

the director is arguing with the script girl
the producer is talking to some newspaper types

Nine-thirty A.M.
actors are sitting in director's chairs
doing crossword puzzles
reading

dozing
careful not to smudge make up
crease wardrobe
muss hair

Eleven A.M.
the director is no longer arguing with the script girl
the producer is talking to some fan magazine types
the assistant to the assistant director shouts
"Places, people!"
the actors get up from their director's chairs
put away the crossword puzzles
and books

try to look awake
careful not to smudge make up
crease wardrobe
muss hair
as they find their marks.

The camera assistant checks the focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the gaffer motions to an electrician
up high
to adjust the key light
by an inch or two.

The director looks through the view finder
says to the camera man
"Higher."

The grip
cranks up the boom on the dolly
"Stop. That's it."

The director sits in his chair next to the camera
the camera assistant adjust the new focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the gaffer motions to an electrician
up high
to adjust they key light
by an inch or two.

Eleven-forty-five A.M.
the director:
"Let's run through it once."
the assistant director
"Quiet on the set."
The director
"Action."
The actors act
the director watches
the camera assistant follows focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the director
"One more time from the top."

Twelve Noon
the assistant to the assistant director
motions to the assistant director
pointing to his watch
the assistant director mumbles to the director
who nods.
"Lunch. One hour."

The gaffer motions to the electricians
on the floor and up high
to turn off the lights
the director leaves
the producer ushers the press people out
the script girl makes a notation
the camera crew secures the camera
the sound crew secures the boom and equipment
all leave

the sound stage is deserted
lit by a single work light
half a day's work is done.

One-oh-five P.M.
the sound stage
camera crew
gaffer
grips, best boys, electricians, assistants
and assistants to assistants

all are back, busy
getting things ready for
SCENE 342 TAKE 1

One-forty-five P.M.
the director is arguing with the script girl
the producer is talking to some other newspaper types
the executive producer doesn't bother to come to the set
the camera man motions to the gaffer
the gaffer shouts something to the electrician

up high
a stand-in stands in
the sound man tells her
"Say something for level"
"One two three four five testing"
"Fine"

Two-thirty P.M.
actors are sitting in director's chairs
doing crossword puzzles
reading
dozing
careful not to smudge make up
crease wardrobe
muss hair

Three P.M.
the director is no longer arguing with the script girl
the producer is talking to some other fan magazine types
the assistant to the assistant director shouts
"Places, people!"

The actors get up from their director's chairs
put away the crossword puzzles
and books
try to look awake
careful not to smudge make up
crease wardrobe
muss hair
as they find their marks.

The camera assistant checks the focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the gaffer motions to an electrician
up high
to adjust the key light
by an inch or two.

The director looks through the view finder
says to the camera man
"Higher."

The grip
cranks up the boom on the dolly
"Stop. That's it."
The director sits in his chair next to the camera
the camera assistant adjust the new focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the gaffer motions to an electrician
up high
to adjust they key light
by an inch or two.

Three-forty-five P.M.
the director:
"This is a take"
the assistant director
"Quiet on the set."
the lowest man on the camera crew
holds the slate
"Scene three forty-two, take one"
the sound man hollers
"Speed."
The director
"Action."
The actors act
the director watches
the camera assistant follows focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the director
"Cut. Once more time from the top, people."
The assistant director
"Quiet on the set."
the lowest man on the camera crew
holds the slate

"Scene three forty-two, take two"
the sound man hollers
"Speed."
The director
"Action."
The actors act
the director watches
the camera assistant follows focus
the camera operator turns his cranks
the director
"Cut. Once more time from the top,
people."

Six-fifteen P.M.
the director
"Cut, Print."
the assistant director
"It's a wrap."

The gaffer motions to the electricians
on the floor and up high
to turn off the lights
the director leaves
the producer ushers the press people out
the script girl makes a notation
the camera crew secures the camera
the sound crew secures the boom and equipment
all leave

the sound stage is deserted
lit by a single work light
a day's work is done.

Time to go home.

During that, my first stay
in this land of milk and money
I called Marianne, my wife, in New York,
"If you still want that child
we've been talking about,
this is the place to have it."

And so it was that we took the step,
moved to California where
Peter was conceived during the very first week
and born the conventional nine months later

in 1943, August,
when we lived in a great house
in Beverly Hills' Benedict Canyon
at the same rent we had paid in New York
for a one-room apartment.

I continued there as a fashion photographer
using many aspiring actresses
as models.
And then don't forget
all those photos of the most sought-after movie stars
of those days:

> There was Lana Turner, a sexy lass
> known in the movies to shake her ass
> Not terribly bright
> but a beautiful sight
> and a star, unique in her class.

One of the peculiarities
of working at a motion picture studio
as a non-union type
was having to put up with
an entire crew of union technicians
standing around, doing nothing.

> Lupe Velez, the Mexican Spitfire who
> was famous for more than one musical show.
> She was larger than life
> With an accent to cut with a knife
> and humor, both high class and low.

I had her lying on the floor
and I was on a ladder with my camera.
She said, "you drop that into my
you-know-what
and that'll be the last you've seen
of your camera."
or something to that effect,
considering that accent
you could never be quite sure
what she was talking about.

> Lucille Ball, not yet a big name
> Worked hard to develop her future fame.
> When it came it was juicy

in *I Love Lucy*
and well she deserved that acclaim.

She was very nice
very pleasant
but there certainly was no hint
of the comedic talent
that made her a millionairess
in the years to come.

Ann Sheridan was more like the girl next door
both sweet and tough with fans galore.
She could swear with the best
just like all the rest
who use four-letter words more and more.

This time it was at Warner Brothers
on one of the sound stages.
Ann, dressed in a skin-tight gold-lamé evening gown
sitting on an elevated throne-type thing
was in the process of finishing a sitting
with the studio still photographer
when someone came in and called to her,

"Ann, Jack Warner wants to talk to you,"
to which her reply
at the top of her rather considerable lung power
was, "Fuck Jack Warner!."

Jane Wyman introduced me one day
to her husband who'd little to say;
He shook my hand hard.
Later caught me off guard:
eight years he was President Reagan, oy weh!

It all took place in their house
in the Hollywood Hills
where you could
(I did at her invitation)
swim in the pool
while overlooking
all of Los Angeles
lying below.

And Hedy Lamarr, as Hedi Kiesler once known

now a vision of glamour, but just flesh and bone
plus make-up galore
to add even more
to the beauty that from screens worldwide shone.

Actually, I was still in Germany
when I saw her in *Ecstasy*
rushing stark naked through the woods
before the picture was banned
by the Nazis
as "degenerate garbage."

Pola Negri, well known as a star with a past,
arrived with an escort, too young to be cast
as her lover, but then
it's beyond my ken
to know how long such beauty can last.

Actually that young escort
was called Adlon
apparently an heir to the
Adlon Hotel fortune
or what was left of it
after the Nazis got through with it.

There was Marlene, the one with the legs
who liked to play *hausfrau*, fix lunch and boil eggs.
She always knew where to put the key light
to make her face come out just right.
For generations to come the personification of sex.

All my life I had wanted to meet her
having fallen in love with her as a small boy
when I saw her in Germany
in a dubbed version
of *The Blonde Venues*,
actually probably one of her worst pictures.
Sadly, I have to admit,
the photos I took of her weren't much.
I was too much in awe of her
and that's never a good basis for
producing good work.

Unlike Jennifer Jones, who seemed quite dull, at a loss
not at all like the actress who soon won the toss
when in the Song of Bernadette

she won an Oscar. How can I forget
that awkward young girl who then wed the boss.

Selznick had sent her to me,
apparently hoping that I'd come up
with some sexy glamour pictures.
I'm afraid I may have disappointed him.

There were dozens of them and others
on the covers of magazines
at the time
resulting in what you might call
my first fifteen minutes of fame.

I was twenty-five,
married and a father,
living in Los Angeles,
when those misguided Germans once more fought the world.

Marlene Dietrich
having decided for some reason
that I should be an actor
sent me to her agent, Charles Feldman.

He took me around to the studios,
I read for parts
and came within a hair's breadth
of playing Chopin in *A Song to Remember*.
I was drafted instead.

Someone called Cornel Wilde got the part.
He didn't turn out to be much of an actor
but was probably a better Chopin
than I would have been.

Maybe that letter
from the President of the United States
was the best thing that ever happened
to the acting profession.

I was put into a uniform and told
to call officers Sir,
a word I had difficulty saying,
once being accused
by a young second lieutenant

of making it sound like the insult
I often meant it to be.

I was inducted into the United States Army
as a buck private
at Fort Mac Arthur in Long Beach south of
Los Angeles
and here, during an early roll call,
I first became aware of the Latino population
when one recruit answered to
Jesus (Haysoos) Hernandez.

I was sent for Basic Training to Camp
Crowder in Missouri,
was taught how to march, shoot a rifle,
aiming it to hit the intended target,
to crawl on my belly under live machine-gun
fire,
to climb telephone poles
without falling down and breaking my back
(as one unhappy soul in my platoon did).

I had in my possession my scrapbook
with all those sexy magazine covers
and I became a bit of a celebrity .

That scrapbook at one point found its way
through channels
all the way up to the company commander.)

But aside from
envy for having actually known
(many thought in the biblical sense,
which was not the case)
these beautiful women
it did me no good whatever,
except I have a slightly dog-eared clipping
from a newspaper from that time:

Co. B of the 29th Bn. probably has the best collection of
pinup pictures in camp since that outfit acquired Pvt. Paul
Garrison for training. In civilian life Garrison operated
large commercial photographic services in New York and
Hollywood, specializing in glamour photographs, and

among his patrons have been some of the most lovely
actresses of the stage and screen world. He says, he has
photographed most all of them, that is, all but Betty Grable.

All that time I was
at least technically
still a German and thus
an enemy alien.
But apparently I wasn't the only one
because one day a large number of us
were ordered to show up at a certain time and place.

There, courtesy of a civilian judge
on April 5, 1944,
in the city of Neosho, Missouri,
I finally became a citizen
of the United States of America.

I was transferred to the Army Signal Corps Photographic Center
on Long Island, New York,
within spitting distance of Manhattan,
and populated by a variety of known and unknown Hollywood types,
actors, screen writers, and others,
the commanding officer, a former assistant film editor
who tried hard to justify his captain's commission
by doing everything "by the book,"
making him one of the more despised commissioned officers
I have ever had the misfortune to come across.

That's where I spent most of the rest of my military career
teaching various officers of rank from
Second Lieutenants to Majors, Colonels, and at least one Brigadier General
how to use camera and take halfway decent pictures
or at least pictures that were in focus.

They were there in training to become combat photographers
(you can't very well run a war
without producing a visual record of it,
as Matthew Brady proved during the American Civil War).

And if you think it was easy telling a general,
even a lowly one-star
Brigadier General,
"Sir, I'm afraid your pictures stink, sir,"

or something to that effect,
you better think again.

I, by that time, a corporal
(shades of Adolf Hitler)
with all of two stripes on my sleeves,
which I remained until
a month before my discharge
(when the Army,
apparently having decided that it wasn't going to be very expensive
in view of my imminent departure,
made me a sergeant,
adding an extra stripe on my sleeves
and a few dollars to the measly few that were paid each month
to the non-commissioned members of the Armed Forces).

Actually I was having a very good time.
I spent $200
on what was described as a 1931 Model A Ford Roadster,
a two-seater
(with a rumble seat)
complete with somewhat tattered canvas top.

For reasons that escape me
I called the car Fubbs,
and Fubbs became my faithful companion for many years to come.

With military discipline being minimal
at this facility
(except when it involved the detested company commander),
I rented a cold-water flat
on the corner of East 46th Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan
for $21 a month,
because living at the base was not much fun.

(Like all New York cold-water flats
it had a bathtub in the kitchen,
and the toilet in the hall.)

I put a box spring and mattress,
bought second hand,
directly on the floor in one corner of one room,

and each morning I raced Fubbs out to the base,
arriving there just in time for saying "Here!"
at the daily morning inspection routine.

One day, it was April 12, 1945
and around chow time,
the radio program was interrupted by the announcement
that President Roosevelt had died.

The effect is hard to describe.
After all, he was in the middle of his fourth term
and many of those present had never known another president.
No one said anything.

There was this eerie silence
and the people just sort of drifted away singly or in groups,
because none really knew how to express the shock.

It didn't help that none of us knew the first thing
about the man next in line,
Harry Truman, the Vice President.

All we did know about him was that he had once been a haberdasher,
(and that somehow didn't seem the ideal preparation
for a President of the United States of America.)

(Granted, during our history
there have been a number of less-than-brilliant people elected President,
but this was war time,
and the old saw about "changing horses in mid-stream,"
especially when one of the horses was a character
who in his earlier years had made a living selling men's socks,
did seem precarious, to put it mildly.

It was only years later, that I,
as well as many others in this country,
came to the realization
that he turned out to be one of the better Presidents we ever had.)

With the Army occupying only eight or nine hours of each day,
I decided that I might as well use my spare time
to add to my measly finances
by continuing my career as a photographer.

I managed to secure Helena Rubinstein
(then next in importance only to Elizabeth Arden)
as a client.

For her I produced one of my more famous full-page color ads
showing a beautiful young lady
(a gorgeous Finnish model called Selena Mahri)
retrieving a letter from her soldier lover from a mailbox.

Anyway, I earned enough extra money
to buy a great trench coat from Abercrombie and Fitsch,
to the shoulders of which
I attached some unofficial tags
describing the wearer as an *Official Armed Forces Photographer*,
plus something described as an *Eisenhower Jacket*
with similar shoulder patches,
all of which stood me in good stead
when I wanted to get into the better nightclubs in New York,
like the Stork Club and El Morocco.

As a matter of fact, Chick Farmer,
the public relations man for El Morocco,
(famous for its zebra-striped settees
that automatically identified the place
whenever a celebrity photograph showed up in the papers or magazines)

appeared to have decided that I was
in some mysterious way
a special person.

The result was,
neither I alone,
or in company of my wife
during her infrequent visits to New York,
ever had any trouble getting in,
even when long lines of people were kept standing in the foyer,
waiting to be permitted entrance.

In the meantime
good old Fubbs had developed a problem.

His cloth top was in tatters
and I "requisitioned" a shelter half from the army supply room
(army terminology for a piece of a tent)
which I had fashioned into a new top.
It didn't look too great, but it did keep out the rain.

One day I happened to read
that Marlene Dietrich was in town.
I called, managed to get her on the phone
and asked her to join me
for an evening at El Morocco to which,
to my surprise,
she readily agreed.

Punctually at the agreed-upon time
I rang the bell, listened for the chime
which produced, believe it or not,
a life-size Marlene, in a full-length white fox cape or coat.

If she at all had any reaction
to the rather unusual contraption,
(an truly unprepossessing oldster
named Fubbs, a 1931 Ford Roadster)
she made no sign
simply settled herself in the seat next to mine.

Off we went to El Morocco
where Bernie, the doorman,
correct to the core, man,
was not impressed by my wonderful Fubbs
(not a car to be found at the better clubs).

He attempted to wave me on, the fool
But seeing Marlene he started to drool;
his mouth dropped open, hasn't closed to this day.
He parked the car down 3rd Avenue way

while we were graciously ushered inside
(other couples waiting for tables outside)
while for us a special table was placed
right onto the dance floor (don't you be amazed).

I remember little of what we talked.
She asked me questions (while others gawked)
about my leaving Germany,
when? why? It was quite uncanny

the way she seemed so interested in
whether or not I liked Berlin,

but there were so oh many intrusions
by people who caused a degree of confusion
as they stopped by to say hello
asking for autographs, to bathe in her glow,
giving me a questioning look,
thinking who is this soldier who took
this most glamorous woman alive
to this high-priced high-society dive.

Back to the army.
In addition to all the still photography
there was another department that taught
newsreel-type motion picture making,
(In those days the film was nitrate, incredibly flammable.)

The weekly routine
of getting rid of the useless negative film,
was taking it by truck to an empty lot somewhere and setting it on fire.
At one occasion, the still new officer in charge decided
that the amount of film to be burned was too great
and that it would be a better idea to burn it in two parts.
He instructed the enlisted personnel
to take half the film to the empty lot and set fire to it,
leaving the rest in the truck.

We did as we were told,
but what no one had noticed was
that one length of clear film had been dragged along the way
from the truck to the empty lot.

As a result, as soon as the fire started,
the strand of film created a flame
racing from the empty lot to the truck
and moments later the truck was just a pile of molten metal.

(Photographic film contains silver.
One of the officers decided to buy that place,
hoping to dig up all that silver after the war.
Whether or not he ever succeeded
in making a profit from this enterprise,

I have no idea.)

One night I was on
what was laughingly referred to as "guard duty."

I guess that's the Army.
Quite obviously,
the chances of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Photographic Center
in the middle of Long Island City
being invaded or even attacked by a bunch of Germans or Japanese
were less than nil.

Still, night after night,
someone had to sit in that silly cubicle next to the Captain's office
and be on the lookout for that non-existent enemy.

Anyway, there I was,
reading a book or something
wondering why the captain was still in his office
since he most probably had nothing of any importance to do.

"Corporal..."
I assumed that he meant me,
there being no one else of any rank anywhere within shouting distance.
"Yes, sir?"
"Come in here a moment."
"Yes sir."
I did,
saluted the way you're supposed to,
and stood at attention
wondering what it was he wanted.
"Sit down, corporal."
I did.
"I wonder if I can ask you something that may seem unmilitary."
"Please do, sir."

"Tell me,
you must have noticed that everyone around here hates me.
Why is that?"

You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather.
"Well, sir..."
I paused, trying to figure out how to go on.
I knew, of course,
why everybody hated his guts,
but how do you tell a guy,

especially when he's your commanding officer?

"You see,
I guess the trouble is that all of us,
well, we're not really soldiers.
We're writers and photographers and directors and producers and actors
and for that matter, you're a film editor, sir."

"But I don't understand."
"You see, sir,
you keep trying to run this place like a real Army base by the book,
and the guys resent that."

We talked for probably a half an hour
and it turned out that the poor guy really had no idea
why people thought he was a real shit,.

Maybe I did get through to him
because from then on he became much more human,
probably as much so as was in him,
and the morale on the place improved considerably.

This was also the time
when my cold-water flat
became "the place to meet."

During those years
I also established what came to be known as
Paul Garrison's Wednesday Nights.
It all started quite harmlessly
with a few friends to come to my place
and to bring whatever friends they might have,
plus a bottle of booze.

Word spread
like wildfire
and pretty soon the place got so jammed with people I knew,
and many I didn't know,
that to get from one room to another
required the kind of technique
that New York subway riders developed during rush hours.
It did get a bit on the loud side at times
--New York had an official midnight
closing time for night clubs during those years--

and once or twice the cops showed up
to tell us to keep it down to a loud shout.
I remember once when a good looking young cop showed up,
one of the sexier girls jumping at him,
exclaiming
oh, you gorgeous man, don't you get away from me!
with which she literally jumped into his arms
and kissed him square on the mouth.
He turned bright red
and as soon as he was able to extricate himself from her embrace,
he was out of there just as fast as he could.

The back windows of the apartment
looked out on a factory building that,
if I'm not mistaken, may have been part of the *Daily News* complex.
Anyway, one night when Simone Simon,
then a fairly well-known actress,
was among the early arrivals,
she sat at the back window, looked out and said to me,
"Why are all those men facing the wall?"
It had never before occurred to me,
but the windows were those of the men's room,
explaining this to her rather peculiar behavior.

There were other celebrities.
Al Capp, the famous cartoonist and creator of the "Li'l Abner" comic strip,
was sitting on the floor,
his legs stretched out flat before him
and he was holding an open pen knife, blade down,
over one of his legs and called out:
"Watch!"
Everyone did and he dropped the knife that ended up
standing vertically imbedded in his leg.

What only a few in the room had known
(I didn't)
was that he had a wooden leg,
making the stunt for them considerably less creepy
than it appeared to the uninitiated majority.

Then one time there were some family members of Bemard Baruch,
a big name in political and financial circles of the day.
They were having a great time
until two apparently "shady ladies" arrived

--I have no idea who brought them
but there was something about them that instantly stamped them
as high- or maybe not-so-high-class call girls
or whatever you might want to call them--
at which moment the gentlemen hurriedly excused themselves,
saying that they could not possibly afford to be seen
in the same room with them,
giving me the definite impression
that at some previous time they must have
shared a room with them, though most likely unobserved.

These parties continued week after week until one day
I received a notice that the Army,
in its infinite wisdom,
was giving me a two-week leave
prior to shipping me off to some undefined destination.
I decided to pocket the transportation money
that the Army allotted me for a train ticket to Los Angeles,
and to drive there in my trusty Fubbs.
Somewhere in the middle of the country
I suddenly heard that familiar siren of a police car
and I knew that I must have exceeded
that ridiculous 35-miles-per-hour speed limit
that had been imposed nationwide during the war to conserve fuel.
I stopped.
So did the highway-patrol car.

The officer came out,
looked at my car,
than at me in my corporal's uniform.
"Do you know how fast you were going?"
"Not really, officer."
"I clocked you at 85 mph. How do you do that in this wreck of a car?"

I made the necessary apologies
and he suggested that I keep it down to a reasonable speed,
but he didn't give me a ticket because,
after all,
I was in the Army and "serving my country."

On that same trip,
at night
on the terribly winding stretch of road
that descends from the ridge of the Rocky mountains
to the level of the Arizona desert,
the car suddenly stopped and refused to budge.
I tried everything
and eventually determined that it was the ignition switch
that had gone on the blink.
I had never hot-wired a car but decided that it couldn't be too difficult,
especially in an old clunker like this.
I did and it worked.
Later on, in Los Angeles,
I installed an ordinary light switch at the base of the steering column.
From then on there was no ignition key for that car.
All you needed to know was
where that cunningly concealed light switch was located
to get the thing running.
And it remained in that condition for years until,
I believe it was in 1948 or '49,
that I finally sold the car for $200,
the exact amount I had paid for it in the first place.

Remember Hans Schülein
the friend I mentioned
having met during my first week in New York?

Well. he had finally met a young woman,
beautiful
A young Portuguese
of eighteen
who wouldn't
without benefit of marriage.

I tried my best
to dissuade him
knowing that inveterate bachelors
like he
make lousy husbands.

To no avail.
So Constance Ford
(a model, friend and later actress)
and I
rented the back room of a bar
in the East 40s

and gave him
a very elaborate and formal
(he wore tails, she an evening dress)
engagement party.

(It is lucky that he paid no attention to me
because the daughter
born a conventional
nine months after their wedding
(by which time John called himself John Steel
though he never legally changed his name)
she gave birth to a daughter
whom they called Danielle,

(and who, many years later
became the Danielle Steel of Romance novel fame.
Too bad, he didn't live to know about
her success).

(The marriage itself
as I had predicted,
didn't last.
He later married Koniko,
a Japanese woman
who was apparently able
to put up with him.)

When I was twenty-eight
there was peace and
the world had changed forever.

A new age
atomic
was upon us, with cosmic destruction
an ever-present possibility.

Back home
and once more a civilian
I used my credits
under the G.I. Bill
to take courses in motion picture making
at the University of Southern California (USC)
(at the time the only one
in the country
giving such courses).

There I met and made friends with
Andrew (Bundy) Marton
(who later received Academy Awards
for directing the chariot race
in the remake of *Ben Hur*
and for the battle scenes in *The Longest Day*).

Here I made a short film
dealing with a daisy
a small child
and an atomic explosion
which was shown on television
(I don't recall when or why).

Remembering it
was the catalyst for a poem
I wrote some fifty years later:

> It was during one of my last years in school
> when I saw it for the first time:
> A daisy
> all white with a yellow middle
> all by itself
> just one
> right there in the middle of that empty lot
> in the South Bronx.
>
> You would not think the South Bronx
> a good place for a daisy
> but still, there it was
> year after year
> each spring and summer
> just one lonely daisy
> right there in the middle of that empty lot
> in the South Bronx.
>
> Horrors!
> They paved over that empty lot
> while I wasn't looking.
> My poor daisy
> gone.

It was the next spring;
a slight buckle in the cement
and then a crack
and something green
trying
oh, so hard.

There
after another week
she was once more,
my daisy
right there in the middle of that paved over empty lot
in the South Bronx.

One day there was another
standing, then kneeling
to look at my daisy.

Don't pick it! I rushed
but she just smiled,
the kneeling girl.
"Isn't she beautiful?" she said
and I nodded.

All that summer we met
right there in the middle of that empty lot
in the South Bronx
to enjoy our daisy.

"They're going to build an office building,"
one day she said.
"Here?"
"Yes, here."
"We must do something."

It took a screw driver, a knife and much patience
but eventually we succeeded
to rescue the daisy
roots and all.
"Where to?" I didn't know.

"Come," she said
and holding the daisy in the palms of her hands
she led the way
to a small room above a bakery
with a bed and a window sill.

From the bed we saw
the daisy standing tall
shining on the window sill
in her enamel pot.

Many years had passed
when I took my son to the no longer empty lot
in the South Bronx
and as we walked up the street
there in the window
on the paint-peeling sill
she stood
proud and erect
nodding her petals slightly
I thought
in greeting.

When I was thirty
another new age,
the second one in this century,
this one benign
more or less
depending on your point of view
changed the world forever:
Television.

I embraced it
achieved my second fifteen minutes of fame and success
with a television series for CBS
that, I knew, would take me to the top
but didn't.

I guess we were just too early
and no one was ready
to take television seriously.
(When I call the Screen Actors Guild
asking what I should pay the actors,
the answer was

"We don't care. That's television
and we've got nothing to do with that."
Hard to believe today, but true just the same.)

One night we came home late
only to find a car parked mysteriously in our driveway.
I told Marianne to go into the house,
that I would deal with whatever that was,
sounding more courageous
than I felt.

"Are you Paul Garrison?"
"Yes."
"Did you take this picture?"
With that they produced
a nude picture of Gloria Gale
that I had done in New York years before
and that had been reproduced in a national magazine.
"Yes, I did. Why?"
"What is the name of the young woman who posed for it?"
"Gloria Gale. Why?
And, by the way, who are you,
and why do you want to know?"
"We work for Jerry Giesler. The attorney."
"Oh."

Things were beginning to dawn.
He was the attorney defending Erroll Flynn
accused of statutory rape by a young girl called Peggy Satterlee,
who did bear a slight resemblance to Gloria and,
as it turned out,
they had hoped to be able to pin this nude picture on her
to imply that she wasn't exactly pure
as the proverbial driven snow
--though, why having posed nude
should be a sign of some sort of moral turpitude
is beyond me--
Disappointed, they drove off into the night.

But the newspapers
and the Hollywood trade papers
had a field day with
The Cases of Eddie Drake
which was the title of the TV series
we were making for CBS

(the first filmed half-hour series ever made for TV).

Actually, the Hollywood Reporter,
read by everyone in the picture business
(and everyone wanting to be in the picture business)
first recognized my presence
in this fabled city
by printing:

The Paul Garrisons' working title for their impending offspring is
Esmeralda.

and later on,
all my activities, both successful
and not so
were faithfully recorded
in a variety
of publications;

> Paul Garrison, who photographed the cover for Capitol's Music Out of the Moon album, is producing the first of a series of six shorts called Music to Look At. The first will use scores from *Music Out of the Moon* as its theme...

Looking back,
when someone asked to interview me,
I should have kept
my mouth shut:

> "I will say unequivocally that the firms produced for television are not the same as motion pictures produced for theatrical distribution. Television itself is even farther away from radio than either theater or motion pictures.
>
> "The closes kinship of the medium is probably with the theater and it is further from motion pictures. If anybody imagines that the present motion picture studio output can be turned to good use in television, he is deluding himself completely. The long shots, the crowd shots, spectacular scenes do not as yet register with any degree of satisfaction in the new medium.
>
> "I would liken the television film producer rather to the good stage director who has the capacity to focus the attention of his audience on that portion of the scene which

must count most with his public at any particular moment. Background action is relegated to the inconspicuous class if the stage director does it right.

"With television he simply blocks out his background action and keeps your eyes arbitrarily fastened on the principals in the scene with his camera. But he cannot shift about and cut, and do all the dozen and one things a motion picture producer does to sustain interest."

What a bunch of nonsense
that turned out to be.

In 1949
with Adrian Marden,
an actress
in the cast of *The Women* on Broadway
I produced
the three-act play
at the Key Theater,
(actually a converted church).
The *Valley Times*, Thursday, July 14:

"The Women," Claire Boothe's noted play which attained great success on Broadway and the screen, will open at the Key Theater, North Hollywood, tonight. The revival is being produced by Paul Garrison and directed by Adrienne Marden and Garrison. Miss Marden was Peggy in more than 600 performances in the Broadway version. The cast of the Key Theater Production features 18 Hollywood film and radio actresses playing 36 roles. Included are Eve McVeagh, Lucia Carroll, Doris Karnes, Dee Torme, Jane Buchanan, Irene Martin and Virginia Lynn. The play has been booked for two weeks. The question most frequently asked by the audience at North Hollywood's Key Theater is "Where did you find such a large group of beautiful girls who can act too?" Producer-director Paul Garrison with the help of Adrienne Marden, co-director, interviewed nearly a hundred girls before selecting the cast of 19 girls. They give a nightly performance, except Monday, at 8:30 in the revival of Claire Boothe's hilarious satire "The Women."

Even Hedda Hopper,
the more feared than beloved
gossip columnist without whose blessing
even Hollywood's most powerful
didn't dare to make a move

(or even get married)
reported:

> Talent scouts should get a new look at "The Women," now playing at the Key Theater in North Hollywood. Some mighty talented youngsters there. It is evident that the keynote to the company's success is the direction of Paul Garrison and Adrienne Marden. In a play where each line is sharp and essential, the rapid delivery required is sometimes difficult, but the pace in this production is its outstanding achievement.

That success was short lived
and after it
I got involved in a wide variety
of show business projects,
(one a full-length motion picture
that
like all the other projects,
never actually got off the ground)
all
representing what might best be described
as the most checkered years
of my checkered career
dutifully reported in
the daily press:

> Helen Walker has been set for the feminine lead opposite Gilbert Roland in "Flight Across the Border" to go into production Tuesday at Motion Picture Center under the direction of Paul Garrison.
>
> Richard Avonde draws featured role in Aries' "Flight Across the Border," with Gilbert Roland.

One incident involves a short motion picture
produced by a group of students from USC.
The picture was a three-minute short
based on Lena Horne's recording of *Frankie and Johnny*,
with the actors acting out the action described by the lyrics.
What made this memorable was the leading lady,
a young girl who called herself Piper Laurie
and who,
as it turned out,

has since become a major character actress
with leading parts in many important motion pictures.
The picture itself was shown
at an official "preview screening"
attended by Lena Horne herself,
who appeared to like what she saw,
congratulated everyone involved
with special emphasis on Piper Laurie.

And the notices in the press
continued:

Aries Productions has set Lou Forbes as musical director on "Flight Across the Border."

> Paul Garrison, who photographed the cover for Capitol's Music Out of the Moon album, is producing the first of a series of six shorts called Music to Look At. The first will use scores from *Music Out of the Moon* as its theme...
>
> Aries Productions, headed by Howard S, Mollring and Paul Garrison, set LOU FORBES as musical director on "Flight Across the Border." HELEN WALKER was handed the femme lead and ROSS ELLIOTT a key supporting part in the Gilbert Roland starrer "Flight Across the Border" being produced and directed respectively by Howard S. Mollring and Paul Garrison under the banner of Aries Productions
>
> Aries Productions, headed by Paul Garrison and Howard S. Mollring inked Frank Puglia for a character lead in the Gilbert Roland-Helen Walker vehicle "Flight Across the Border." Garrison wrote and is megging the drama.

Somewhere along the line
I was asked to produce a public-service announcement
starring Charles Lawton.
Well, the idea of my directing Charles Lawton
seemed a bit intimidating at first,
but he was a "real doll,"
(in other words,
a true professional)
and it all worked out beautifully.

Another fleeting occupation
that brought in a few dollars

was the production of a series of readings by Napoleon Hill of his best-selling book *Think and Grow Rich*.

I don't remember how many of those episodes I put on film,
there were quite a few,
but despite my having to listen to all those pronouncements of his about how to get rich and famous,
I'm afraid I either wasn't listening hard enough,
or whatever that theory of his is,
it just doesn't want to work with me.

Eve Miller set as Cleopatra for Workshop Productions' "Love Scenes" film series. Paul Garrison has inked Karen Sharpe and Aline Towne for vidpix being produced by his Workshop Productions.

Paul Garrison of Workshop Productions, has secured bankrolling for first group of 39 15-min. telepix, "Love Scenes," and has inked Hugo Haas to intro each episode. Lester M. Cook, producer of the series is negotiating a distribution deal.

Portrait photographer Paul Garrison is now devoting his full time to a new TV film series: "Love Scenes," and will be available for only a limited number of photographic assignments by arrangement with the Austin Hollywood Studio.

Bulber Paul Garrison now devotes his entire time to his TV series and will be available for photographic assignments only be special arrangement with Austin Studios.

Paul Garrison has raised $195,000 to finance his "Love Scenes" quarter hour films. Since I would certainly remember having access to such an amount, it had to be a phony item.

Paul Garrison's Workshop Productions starts shooting Feb. 28 on four different series of six-minute TV films, 52 films to each series.

Eve Miller plays the title role in Workshop Production of "Cleopatra" to be telefilmed this week. Paul Garrison wrote the adaptation.

Paul Garrison's Workshop Productions has two film series

in production, "Variety Theater" and "Our United States,"
both short subjects. George Bagnall will distribute.

When I was forty
jet airplanes replaced pistons
helping to shrink the world again
this time to the global village
already predicted by those who knew
television to be an unstoppable force
for good, bad and above all
international
and
mediocre.

I was hired for a job
(one of the few times in my life
when I was gainfully employed)
as writer/directo
r
by a company called Jam Handy
in Detroit
to write and direct
motion pictures and other types of audio-visuals
for companies such as General Motors
Dana Corporation
Frdgidaire
and others
while Marianne worked for
Friends magazine
published by General Motors
for Chevrolet.

We lived in a funny little apartment,
part of a private house,
in Saint Claire Shores,
and it was during that time
that I acquired a
used 1954
Cadillac Eldorado convertible,
with enormous fins
white, 22 feet long,
with red real-leather upholstery
for $500.

After two years

we had enough of Detroit
and went back to Los Angeles
where Peter,
now a student at Harvard University in Boston
lived with Marianne's parents
during visits home.

I formed a company to produce
industrial show business
such as
live shows
motion pictures
multi-media audio-visuals
for such clients as
IBM
National Cash Register
Jockey Shorts Company
Max Factor
Nutrilite
The Kern County Land Company
Crown Zellerbach,
a chemical company in Yazoo City
that made artificial fertilizer,
(asked what I would suggest to call the film
I said
--not very diplomatically
how about, "No Shit"
which was greeted with prolonged silence
but had no lasting ill effect)
and others.

I was charging
receiving and spending
a lot of money
with little of it ever ending up
in our bank account.

Another incident of paid employment
was a brief stint
with UPA
of *Mister Magoo* fame.
This involved living in New York for several months
to try and promote TV Commercials
for the company.

One day I escorted a fairly sensational blonde
for drinks
in the St. Regis Hotel bar.

It was there that a lanky character,
dressed in a slightly wrinkled gray suit
and tennis shoes
arrived
and sat at a table across from us.

"Damn," she said.
"What's the matter?"
"That's Howard Hughes."
"I know." I had recognized him the moment he entered.
"I'm supposed to be having a date with him."
"Oh."
"I don't want to. He's a boring shit."
"Oh." What else was I to say.
"I better tell him."
"Okay."

We both walked over to the famous billionaire;
she introduced me,
we shook hands,
(the only time in my life
I held the hand of a billionaire
in mine)
she told him she wanted to stay with me,
he said, "Fine,"
or something like that,
and we went back to our table.

That then was my one and only meeting
with that famous man
who
at that time
had not yet turned as nutty
as he did later on.

The blonde
was the inspiration for
a dream?
reality?
You decide:

It was dark when she came in after her shower
but she saw him
in her bed.
"Just lie still," he said.
She was quite naked
and, not sure whether she was supposed to yell for help
or put her arms around him
she simply crawled under the covers
lying flat on her back
the next move would be his.

He pulled back the covers
looked at her for what seemed the longest time in the light of the moon
kissed her neck
a hand moved to one of her breasts, slowly touching it
ever so lightly with just the tips of his fingers
his mouth
the warm moisture of his lips moved to her shoulder
then down
lingering here and there for moments
finding her hips, thighs, the inside of her legs.

She dared not move.
He moved
his weight flattening her breasts. He took her head into both of his hands
looked at her
smiling just ever so slightly.
Then his mouth,
she thought that she had been kissed before; apparently she was wrong.
Then inside her, throbbing
barely moving.

She thought she would explode,
moved her hips
first slowly, then faster and faster
until...

I learned to fly
little airplanes and learned to love it.
Spent five thousand hours
in what someone called
the wild blue yonder
(much of it smog and haze).

Five thousand hours up there

most boring with moments of stark terror
thinking, "It's been a good life; so if..."
But I'm still here.

When I was fifty five
we moved to a small town;
Santa Fe; getting too old for the tempo of
big cities.

I came and saw the famous light
sky blue in days and black at night.
I smelled the air, so clean, no smog,
not even early morning fog.

Adobe walls of mud and straw
and friendly faces, good to know;
plus prices that I could afford.
Those were the days, recall, oh Lord,
when movie stars stayed in L.A.
and other celebs stayed away.

As new arrivals tend to do
I drove around to places new
like Puye Cliffs and Bandelier
and Indian dwellings, far and near;
lunched at the Shed and La Posada
on chili green and enchilada.

The Plaza then was still a place
where you could meet friends face to face;
and in August, the Indian Market
a must to see; no place to park. It
simply is one of its kind
with artifacts to blow your mind.

Quite soon thereafter all are yearning
to watch the old Zozobra burning;
he's Old Man Gloom who must depart
before each year's Fiestas start.

They are each year the celebration
of Don de Varga's restoration
of Spain's continued subjugation
of what was once an Indian nation.

But all year long you can take part
in gallery offerings, where art

and diff'rent artists old and new
present they work to me and you.

These galleries on Canyon Road
do try their best to urge and goad
visitors into spending money
by fair means, foul, and sometimes funny.

There is, of course, more to this place
of varied cultures, colors, race
but none of this can be enjoyed
unless you live here (unemployed
because there is no industry
to hire you or him or me).

I must admit (please stop your laughter)
like all before and still more after,
I hoped, though knowing it was dumb,
that I might be the last to come
the last to come along this way,
to this place known as Santa Fe.

I wrote twenty-some books
about flying and other subjects
(model railroading, adobe architecture, oil and gas exploration)
quite unaware
that for the third time in this century
a revolution was in the works.

Meanwhile I took walks,
every morning,
every day:

For twenty years
going on twenty-one,
two miles a day
three-hundred and fifty days a year
(allowing for rain or snow)
in all that time
add up to
over fourteen thousand miles
or one half way around the equator.

This is a small town
this Santa Fe,
(though growing, I'm sad to say)

and on my daily walks
I meet two kinds of people,
natives who smile
look me in the eye
and say "Hi,"
or something like that;
and visitors from big places
like New York or Los Angeles
who wouldn't think of
looking me
(you, or any one)
in the eye
or smiling
or saying "Hi."

And every once in a while
there's a pretty young woman
to flirt with
which
at my age
is just a bit of harmless fun.

I wonder how many more miles,
how many more smiles
and "Hi"s, and how many more
of those stern determined ones,
looking straight ahead.

Those are the ones I feel sorry for
because they don't look
as if they ever have any fun;
and if you can't have fun,
why bother to keep on walking?

When I was sixty
even I was aware that it had happened:
Computers the personal kind
like the atomic bomb and television before
changed the world
into one that we, old folks by now,
found difficult to take in our stride.

I learned to use them,
make friends with the new,
wrote twenty more books,
this time mostly about computers

and software
(still,
as I had learned at age five,
using one finger of one hand)
to hit the keys
that too,
had progressed from typewriters
manual and electric
to word processors with 101 keys
but still only 26 letters
with which to say what we have to say,
assuming it is worth saying.

In the interim
there had been the time of Richard Nixon
Watergate and the resignation in disgrace of an American President.
There had been Ford
about whom is not much to say.
The country then elected
and then got tired of
a Democratic President,
Jimmy Carter
who also didn't make it
for more than one turn;
only to be replaced by the man
with whom I'd shaken hands
in Jane Wyman's garden
in the Hollywood
Hills,
one Ronald Reagan
an actor
who played the part of President to perfection
for eight years.

He spent over two trillion dollars
on not needed defense
against the Soviet Union
(the *evil empire*)
which, as it turned out,
was more afraid of us
than we were of it.

Debts:
something owed,
something to be repaid

eventually.

Individuals,
you
I
just about everyone
owes something that needs to be repaid
eventually.

Companies,
large
small
huge
conglomerates
frequently borrow
and thus owe huge sums
that must be repaid
eventually.

No problem:
individuals,
companies, large and small,
have the capability to earn
and thus to repay.

And if they can not,
there is Chapter 11
and if it's really bad,
Chapter 7;
not good choices
but choices just the same.

But it's embarrassing.

By the time you read this
this country will owe
close to five trillion dollars
($5,000,000,000,000.00)
and growing
by the second
tick, tick, tick.

It's embarrassing.

A country, any country, the United States of America
unlike an individual

or a company
does not have the capacity to earn
and thus
to repay
its debts.

But
a country, any country, the United States of America
cannot opt for
Chapter 11
or
Chapter 7.

Then what?

What if the creditors
holding United States Savings Bonds
all
would want their money
tomorrow?
They won't.
But what if they did?

It'd be embarrassing.

It happened to another country.
Germany
way back in the early 1920s.
It had to pay
but there was no money.
The solution?
Print money and more money
on paper
with nothing to back it up.

What happened?
Inflation
run-away inflation
until all money
new and old
was worthless.
The bills were paid
with
worthless currency.

Is that an option?

It was for Germany
defeated after the first World War.
But for my country?
The United States of America?

The most powerful
richest
country in the world?

It's embarrassing.

No way!

Then what?

Maybe declare
arbitrarily
that from today on
every Savings Bond dollar
is worth only a dime.

Bingo!

The national debt would be
only five hundred billion
($500,000,000.00)

Only?

But it'd be embarrassing.

So what is the solution?
Leave it to the next generation
to worry about
and the one after that
and the one coming later.

It's embarrassing.

The next on the list was George Bush
who liked to fight small wars
always at Christmas time

which brought him short lived
(very short lived)
fame and success
despite which he was kicked out
after only one term.

One day
there was a letter in my Post Office box
in Santa Fe
from the *Oberbürgermeisterin* of Hamm
inviting me
(along with other non-Aryans
who had left during the Nazi time)
to spend a week in Hamm
with all expenses
covered by the city.

During that week
I stood at the empty lot where our house had stood
at Ostenallee 86.
Today all there was
were weeds
and lo and behold
the old Chestnut tree
I had climbed as a kid:

There it stands, tall, gnarled, old
very old
probably going way back to the nineteenth century
the chestnut tree
in which
some seventy-odd years ago
I had built my tree house.
I was (who remembers?)
five, six, maybe
and wanted a private place.

Here I stand today
back in Europe
Germany
the town of my birth
for the first time
after fifty-plus years
looking at the overgrown empty lot
where the house

in which I was born
once stood.

All gone,
all, except the old chestnut tree
who knew me when...
when?
Way back, before there was a Hitler
or those brown-shirted thugs
who were the reason I left
when I did
way back in 1937...

I was nineteen then
in that June of 1937 and
after four years of Hitler
I was ready to leave
for America and freedom.

I remember the scene:
a compartment in a railroad car
moving west
toward the border with Holland.
Would I make it?
Would I be permitted?
Would they let me?
They
with their brown shirts
and black, white and red swastika armbands.
I had told the authorities
that I was leaving to study abroad,
that I would be back.
I had lied.

Did they know that?
Did they suspect?
The door to the compartment opened;
a brown shirt,
a black/white/red swastika armband,
blond hair,
blue eyes,
young,
not much older than I.
The Aryan ideal,
heels clicking,
"*Papiere bitte!*"

I tried not to shake,
not to look the way I felt
afraid.
The brown shirt studied the papers
seconds
minutes
hours
it seemed like...
"*Alles in Ordnung!*"
The brown shirt handed me my papers
and turned away
clicking heels.

The train moved on
west
across the border into Holland.
Free at last!

Free?
In the United States of America
The Land of the Free and the Brave
(this, after all, was the late 1930s)
I learned about
restricted:
"Jews need not apply."
Free?
"We don't serve coloreds."
or farther to the South:
Whites Only

I worked
earned a living
married
had a son
joined the Army
fought Hitler
in the land of my birth
alongside American soldiers
white
black
yellow
red

Jews
Christians
Moslems
others
things began to change then
slowly.

Later on there were the icons of change
Rosa Parks
Martin Luther King
freedom marches
and corpses, black and white

Other corpses followed
John F. Kennedy
Martin Luther King
Robert Kennedy

And then the ogres changed from
black
to
communist
or "fellow traveler"
and witch hunts
called
The un-American Activities Committee
or
McCarthy
(not Charlie, the junior senator from Wisconsin)

What about today
as I stand in front of the empty lot
overgrown
nearly obscuring the old chestnut tree,
wondering when my country
(America, I mean, not where I was born)
will ever grow up.

What country ever truly does grow up?
England?
It grew old; but up?
France?

Germany?
Russia, now no longer red?

Maybe countries are like people.
They grow old
but few
only very few
ever truly grow up.

Do trees?
My chestnut tree looks grown up
contented
a gnarled trunk, dark brown
with branches and green leaves
a bit of history
eternity.

Back to reality
to the United States of America
the richest
most powerful
last remaining
superpower on earth.
When will it grow up?

His popularity having vanished into a prolonged recession
Bush (another one-term President)
was replaced by a young man
from Arkansas (of all places)
with a smart wife.
He
it seems
looked good or at least promising.

His opponents and detractors
include
a self-made multi-billionaire
called Ross Perot
who,
unsuccessfully, thank heaven,
tried to buy the Presidency
and who continues to buy the attention of millions
(like a Hitler with money)
spouting platitudes,
collecting followers

and probably the most dangerous man in the country
today.

Two years into the term of that young President
a Democrat
the mid-term election
proved the fickleness of the American people
who elected
a huge Republican majority
for both houses of congress,
once more declaring at the ballot box

"We want change."
But change from what?
To what?
Well,
the next two years may be interesting.

Meanwhile there were the usual Christmases
at the usual times
reminding me of the holiday traditions
I grew up with:

Once upon a time
in a large house
in a small town
in a far-away country called Germany
there lived a young boy called Paul.

For him the fall and winter months
that he knew would lead to
Christmas
seemed never to end.

But then one day
in mid-December
the doors to one part of the large house
were locked.
He knew then
Christmas was near.

For weeks before
he and his family spend evenings
making presents for one another.
(The idea of *buying* presents

never even e ntered
Paul'
mind.

Parents *bought* presents.
Kids *made* presents.)

Finally the cherished evening came
on December 24.
The doors were unlocked
and the entire family,
sisters and brothers, friends of the family
and always one stranger
who did not appear to belong
advanced to the door to the *Weihnachtszimmer*.

There an enormous tree
lit by the flickering light of hundreds of real candles
decorated with angel hair
silver and gold gleaming balls
and hand-blown glass ornaments
stood in its wondrous glory.

Before entering the room
Christmas songs were sung
and something called *Yuleklapp*
*(*a huge carton)
was hurled into the room
by no one knew whom.
It revealed a multitude of smaller packages
each containing still smaller packages
finally producing incidental presents
for each person there.

Only then was it time for Paul
to rush to the tree
and find out
which of his wishes were fulfilled
in the colorfully wrapped packages
under the tree.

The tree was lit only once more after that day
always on New Year's Eve.

It then miraculously disappeared.
Paul never wondered where it came from
and where it went.

Imagine the shock when one day
hidden in an unused leanto at the far side of the house
he found the sad remains of the tree
with some of the angel hair still stuck.

He didn't tell any one.
The discovery was too horrible to talk about.

Many years later
with a wife and a young son of his own
living in an apartment in New York
it saddened him that there was no room
to keep Christmas preparations secret.

Young Peter
once old enough to know what was going on
watched the tree being bought
erected
and decorated with angel hair
silver and gold balls,
hand blown glass ornaments
and lights;
electric lights that were turned on
with a flick of a switch
even before Christmas Eve.
(And no one sat around making presents.
Presents were bought in stores.)

Also, there was not that extra person,
(the one
- Paul had learned later -
with no family,
who his parents felt,
should not have to spend Christmas Eve alone).

The only touch of the cherished family tradition
that survived

was the fact
that the celebration itself took place
after dark on Christmas Eve.

It may have been fate that
on a business trip to Europe
Paul stood in the tree-lined street,
looking at the house of his youth
on the 24th of December
in the late afternoon.

On a sudden impulse
(he could never explain why he had done it)
he rang the door bell.
A lovely woman
(he guessed in her early thirties)
appeared. "Yes?"

"I'm sorry to intrude," and he gave his name
explained
that this was the house in which he grew up
(but found it difficult to go on).

"Oh, please come in
meet my husband and the children.
We were just about to start our Christmas.
Won't you please join us."
And so it came to pass
that he was the lone stranger
invited to share in the traditional family Christmas,
finding himself in the open door to the long remembered room
with a tall tree

decorated with real candles
and angel hair
gleaming silver and gold balls
and hand blown glass ornaments,
singing along with the others
Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.

To this day,
in my old age
I remember a long-dead German poet
called Christian Morgenstern
and can still recite some of his
nonsense-poems.

So,
when I started to write poetry,
I thought of him:

> Before I got going, I didn't know
> if, when, or how the ink would flow
> but once I started
> it simply darted
> and didn't have any intention to stop
> unconcerned in resulting success or flop.
>
> The trick, of course, is to not to be
> scared off by published poetry.
> Such writers too, started one day
> with nary a thought and little to say.
> But words have a way of being there
> just as you need them, when and where
> they fit into your poem's line.
> Who knows? Your writing may be fine.

There were those
silly rhymes
that made no sense at all,
except
they are fun:

> An eagle
> taught a beagle
> to look regal.
>
> Why?
>
> The rain worm explained to me in time:
>
> The bird, shrewd
> trying not to be rude,
> was interested only in rhyme.

and in this life

which appears to consist
of one contradiction after another,
they are a perfect subject
with which to
play around:

The oxymoron, though only a word,
not like a being, that can be hurt,
was tired of being misunderstood
and made the decision to do what it could
to end its nebulous semi existence
and take on a life to offer resistance.
Thus conscious, it found that it resented
being the equal to oxy-demented.

I am, it said, once it could speak
I am, you might say, both strong and weak,
hopefully hopeless, cheerfully bleak,
completely odorless, ghastly to reek.

The trouble was that no longer a word,
but a living thing, a thing to be heard,
it needed to think thoughts of its own making,
the time had come to stop all that faking,
that hiding behind that safety bit
of living both sides of the opposite.

Thus tired of being both living and dead
it fled to its comf'table safety net
of being simply a word to be used
instead of constantly being accused
of not being able to make up its mind
between loving, vicious, nasty or kind.
In desperation it begged its good fairy,
"Please, take me back to the dictionary."

or let your imagination
play with the
impossible:

Once upon a time there's said to have been
a fence of pickets with spaces between,
spaces so no one was able to hide,
as always you could see the other side.

An architect who happened by
returned one day, and on the sly
removed those spaces one and all,
used them to build a mansion tall.

The picket fence, it stood alone
with pickets, but all spaces gone,
a picture, dreadful to behold
thus, razed by the mayor, we are told.

and each second year
come election time
the masters of exaggeration
have a field day:

It is that ugly beast you find
wherever hucksters and their kind
in politics and advertising
and pushing goods, called merchandising
are busy selling bills of goods
like mystic cures, organic foods.

They think (insulting it may be
that they believe that you and me--
that I and you are dumb enough
to fall for all that stupid guff).

They think that calling it *the greatest*
and more than once also *the latest*,
that you and I and me and you
will be persuaded through and through
to part with our hard-earned money
convinced that all is milk and honey.

Just think the adman's favorite phrase
It's the best there is, just buy a case.

Or listen to your congressman
who claims your vote will help him ban
the mischief of the opposition,
the surest way to your perdition.

And all that stuff to save your health
(when all you really want is wealth).

There's costly cereal to eat
to which you add fruit, milk or meat
the cost of which is not included
when through the ads you were deluded
(not you or I, we're much too smart
to fall for the promoter's art).

When through the ads you were deluded
to think that all that was included
would help you live your life for ever
and keep you healthy, fit and clever.

The truth about those words like *most*
and *best, latest, improved*, a host
of such hyperbole
are used to fool all, you and me
in thinking that we're getting more
than what we're really paying for.

or,
how about having inanimate objects
take on a life
of their own:

A sandwich bag (biodegradable)
devoid of a thing still edible
was left on the ground
(slobs truly abound)
to be snowed on and rained
feeling cold, lonesome, and pained
unable to wrap itself around
a sandwich of sliced-meat or ground,
but simply left there (how could one guess?)
feeling abandoned and useless.

Alas, will wonders never cease
this piece of junk began to sneeze
since chemical reaction, true
of moisture, raw material and glue
bega n to turn this erstwhile thing
into a liv-, think- and be-ing.
capable of catching cold,
of being human young, not old.

Who knows what it might yet achieve
(can you imagine it, believe?)
to think and talk in words and feel
enjoyment, pain (can it be real?)

But look! Oh no, it can't be so.
A quite enormous all-black crow
has spotted what was once a thing
but what was now developing
into an entity, unique.

That crow, it dove, it took a peek
then snapped it up and flew away
because it is a bird of prey.

The loss to all is hard to measure.
A thing of paper, that at leisure
was in the process of becoming
a speaking, thinking, living, humming
creature, unique, one of a kind
now lost to us (it bends the mind
to think, pure greed, stupidity
killed it for all eternity).

and then there is always
the one thing that
may not bring happiness
but it sure makes life
a lot more pleasant:

Life is great, but fairly expensive.
Not wanting to put you on the defensive
without money life can also be had
but then it is not nearly that great.

then,
if all else fails,
let's talk about the precious something
that is increasingly
in short supply:

It all started when someone
(I forget who,

but it may have been the devil)
invented the radio.

No more silence
by which to read
relax
enjoy, instead
noise pollution
music
talk
talk
talk
and more talk

noise.

A quiet walk in the woods
to enjoy nature
watch birds
and squirrels or deer
all the while
wearing a
Walkman

while on the streets and highways
cars drive by
with
boomboxes

I do believe
that there is nothing on earth
that most Americans
are afraid of more
that five minutes of

and while everyone
keeps asking government
to kindly stay out
of our lives,
why do we insist on having it
protect us from
ourselves?

They tell me I'm an air bag
and I tell you, it's a big drag

being an air bag.

You sit in the car, driving all over the place
squeezed into your box, ready to face
your duty in case the driver should hit
a brick wall or something just as stupid
except, of course, it is just my luck
that the driver is cautious, a careful schmuck.

So there I sit, folded and ready to spring
year in and year out, a most useless thing.

They tell me I'm an air bag
I may save the day.
I repeat, it's a big drag, despite what they say
because if I actually ever get used
it's the end, my friend. May I be excused
to repeat what I have said before,
being an air bag is a big fat bore.

no matter how long you live,
there are some things
you learned in your youth
that you never forget, like a respect for
order
and
law:

Herman was no longer young
when on one day his pride was stung
as at an intersection he
was hit by car in leg and knee.

Once still alive, back on his feet
He wondered how come he was hit.

To find out who could be at fault
He spent much time, (and caught a cold)
in libraries with books on law
to find the interesting flaw
that would permit the accident
that caused his trouser leg to rent.

What he then learned on this occasion
was sure to fill him with elation
because it said that come what may

pedestrians have the right of way.

But being German through and through
it wasn't long until he knew
that all that happened was a dream
because (and this was clear to him)
if laws gave him the right of way
no car could have been there that day.

For about fourteen years
there was another member
of our household.

His name was
Bruno:

It's all there
in the eyes
the trust.
That kind of unwavering trust
I'll never find
with anyone else
and it makes up for the
hair on the rug
sofa
easy chair
and the occasional mess
when he comes in from the rain
(using his own door)
wet and smelly
lying at my feet
with those trusting eyes
saying
"I'm your best friend."

And in a somber mood
but decidedly
not autobiographical:

When I was little
I never thought about it.
The Hum.

The hum of my mother
talking
talking to father, brother, me,

to the stove,
the fridge,
the washer-dryer,
the morning cereal,
the boiling egg,
the cooking meal,
the door,
wall,
ceiling,
or just the air.

And then she died.
And the hum
was gone.

I miss The Hum.

One day, an odd,
sort of depressing mood,
brought on
what might be described
as

It was easier than I had thought
it would be
to stand on that ledge
at the very edge
forty three stories above the street.

Cars stuck in traffic
seemed very small, as did the people
scurrying about;
hurry
that had been the life I decided to leave,
hurry
always hurry up and then wait
it just wasn't worth it
and so I jumped.

Stories rush by
forty-two
forty-one
forty, my office
used to be
did I leave a note?
thirty-nine

thirty-eight
thirty-seven, I can't remember,
I must have,
after all, there's still Ann
I love her
love?
loved?
thirty-six
thirty-five
thirty-four
kind of too late to worry about
Ann
and the kids
they'll get over it
one always does
thirty-three
thirty-two
thirty-one
why am I counting?
they're going faster now
twenty-nine
twenty-seven
twenty-five
twenty-three
the cars are getting bigger
still stuck in traffic
what a long way
down
what a long time
down
nineteen
fifteen
eleven

sorry, Ann, but I just can't handle it any longer
forgive me
six
two
.....

there are sirens, but I hear them
no more.

And
as we are all

prone to do in moments
of contemplation:
wondering
what if...

My days were pretty much routine
shower, breakfast and morning walk
before sitting at the writing machine
to put out a day's work, interrupted by talk

from the woman I live with, the one I love
my wife of five plus decades and thus
the one I can count on each day and above
all can lean on, confide with never much fuss.

And so, between daily work, laughter and talk
the days move quickly from morning to night
with work while she, watchful as a hawk
makes sure socks are washed and all is all right.

That was then, but this is now.
She died in her sleep; I don't know how
I'll manage to get through the day all alone
and lonely, hope somehow that just the phone
might wring with a voice, if not hers, than just any
to cut the day short. It does seem uncanny
how days spent alone can drag on for ever
I miss her, damn; way back then, I never
thought life without her would be quite so glum.
I wonder if she, by no means being dumb,
really knew how much I would miss her and grieve
because if she did, why the hell did she leave?

But there are,
of course
other times when:

Hope Springs...

...eternal.
It better, because
if there is nothing to hope for
we're dead
without being dead.

Hope for
money
better weather
love.

Hope for
understanding
a promotion
money
friends
health
money

Hope springs eternal.
It better, because
if there is nothing to hope for
we're dead
without being dead.

Something has happened
in recent years.
I don't know how it happened
but it did.
Everybody runs around with weapons
guns and rifles
preferably semi-automatic,
and murders, rapes and assaults
are too common
to be reported
in the newspapers
or on radio and TV.
Something went wrong,
somewhere along the line:

I am a man, do I have to confirm
the fact of my manhood at every turn?

I think not, because I know without doubt
who I am; not like some muscle-bound lout

who feels that he must prove to every one
that he is in charge, not one who would run

from danger, villain or other such nut
who deserves to get a swift kick in the butt.

There is nothing wrong with a man being tender
with cherished ones of the opposite gender

or feeling compassion, concern and regard
for those who need help, who are trying hard

to survive in this world where cruelty reigns
where it's par for the course when a small boy complains

"I don't have a gun. How can I survive,
protect myself, and make sure I arrive
to a ripe grown-up a ge of
twenty
or
more
surrounded by others with weapons galore?"

Something, it seems, to have gone awry
when boys, men and others are forced to rely

on guns, knives or gizmos designed to spray mace
into intruders', rapists', opponents' face;

when common courtesy is thought of by most
a sign of weakness; avoid at all cost;

to appear less macho than other guys
god forbid, one might think of you as nice.

No, tough guys are what it's all about
today, above all, what you seek is clout.

There was, once upon a time, a thought
that gentlemen where the kind that ought

to be revered as models of role
models for rich men and those on the dole,

but *gentle* as part of a man's illustration
seems no longer valid, as all admiration

is lavished on rockstars, sports stars and such
whose contribution to history's not very much

who never have learned that the way to behave

includes decent manners from cradle to grave.

Oh well, I guess you'd be told if you asked it:
The world's going to hell in a basket.

I suppose it is pointless
to pretend
(as much as I would like to)
that age
is passing me by:

Three simple letters
No more, no less, just three innocent letters
Why?
Why do three perfectly harmless little letters combine to spell such an ugly word: old

O -

L - D OLD.
The Thesaurus is no help:
aged, elderly, patriarchal, seasoned
battered, dilapidated. shabby, tattered
ancient, antique, archaic
antiquated, outmoded, passé, quaint
prehistoric, primeval, primordial...

Well,

seasoned, maybe.
But I like the antonyms better
young, fresh, modern, fashionable.

How's that song go again?
As long as you're young at heart...

I keep saying, "I'm going to be seventy-seven any day now,"
hoping,
hoping that they'll say, "but you couldn't be..."
but they never do.

old...

It means memories
friends come and gone
memories
hours alone in little airplanes,
hours, thousands of them, boring,
sometimes beautiful but mostly boring
except for those inevitable moments of stark terror.

memories
the photography years
girls, beautiful girls; where are they now?
Mothers? Grandmothers? God forbid...

memories
the Army years
The Best Years of Our Lives as in the movie?
Heroics, excitement?
Not for me. A waste of time.

Old...

Silly. You've got another twenty good years.
Good years.
How good?

Twenty new years missing everything,
new memories
new loves
new excitements
new experiences
new sex.

That's why old is an ugly word,
no new memories
no new sex
no old sex
no sex
no....

And now,
I'm four years short of eighty;
the next century just over the horizon;
what more can this one bring?
I may just find out.
But do I want to?

I have that appointment
at midnight New Year's Eve 1999
at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church ruins
in Berlin
with that young aspiring
Luftwaffe pilot I saw last as a boy.
Will he be there?

Will I?

END.